



*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to
embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. Ecclesiastes 3: 1, 4, 5*

I have always loved studying history. When I read about events from hundreds and thousands of years ago, I can enjoy the stories with excitement instead of fear. For example, the black plague, the Spanish flu, and diverse other pandemics all seem dramatic and interesting *from a distance*. Now that I am living through a pandemic, I don't find it nearly so interesting. The Black plague lasted from 1346 to 1353 - seven years! The Spanish flu raged from 1918-1920 and took the lives of 17 million people! Compared to these two events, COVID doesn't seem so bad. After all, only 4.4 million people have died since the first case was reported in December 2019.

However, I have been with families when they lost someone to COVID. I saw a son go down on his knees at his mother's bedside finally able to see her just hours before she passed. I have spoken on the phone with wives struggling to tell me – through their own coughing – how horrible it was to be separated from their husband in the hospital. I got frantic phone calls from adult children asking me to find a way to baptize or anoint their parent, because everything else was failing, so why not get God involved. For every one of those 4.4 million people that have died, there are many loved ones left grieving.

Churches all across the USA stopped having in-person worship in March 2020. Ever since that time, doing ministry has been really, really hard. It isn't ever easy to do kingdom work in a broken world, but having to remain apart and then get back together and then apart again has made it so much harder. One significant challenge, is that different people are afraid of different things. In the one congregation of St. Timothy, there are some people that have a hard time breathing in masks AND there are people that are worried to be around people that aren't

masked. There are people that are nervous about the vaccine and people that couldn't get vaccinated fast enough. Everyone's fears and concerns are valid, but it can be tricky caring for everyone with significant diversity of experiences and concerns.

One thing that I know, for sure, does not help is to write others off as stupid or uncaring when they disagree with us. Every single week since I have started serving as your pastor, I have spoken to people that are angry, sad, and scared. No one has said, "I just don't care about the other people at church." But a whole lot have said, "I don't know if the others care about me and my family." I think, the church is a microcosm of our broader society. This is how a lot of people are feeling about almost everything from shopping to working to education. We work out in our minds the balance of safety and function and it's frustrating when others don't "let" us do what we think is best.

Whether we like it or not, we are still in a pandemic. Whether we like it or not, the world – including the church – changed 18 months ago. We can neither bully nor wish COVID away. Along with the rest of society, the church is working to recover from all that has happened (or not happened). Recovery requires love of neighbors. It requires trust in God. More than ever, we need people to step up and serve the community. What are you going to do to help out?

Some ways to help:

Volunteer with children's activities like Sunday School

Help with Heart and Hands

Serve in Worship as usher, reader, cantor, altar guild, or assisting minister

Visit, call, send cards to some of our parishioners that can't get to church

Start a bible study or fellowship group

